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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that former Secretary of Education William Bennett's "war on drugs" (he now directs the government's campaign against drugs) is not being waged against those who sell and use drugs, but against the civil liberties of everyone. The paper maintains that under the guise of ridding society of what President Bush called "the greatest threat facing the nation," increased police powers have consistently attacked constitutional guarantees against illegal search and seizure, self-incrimination, guilt by association, false arrest, cruel and unusual punishment, and due process. The paper examines Bennett's version of doublespeak to show that: (1) the call-to-arms is not really addressing the entire nation but is aimed at conservative law-and-order white voters; and (2) the "enemies" are not just the drug dealers but also users, parents and friends of users, landlords of users, and organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) that defend users. The paper also maintains that the war fosters racism and diverts voters from the economic problems facing the nation. The paper concludes that the "Good War" goes on, disguised by Orwellian doublespeak that conceals the real targets--the underclass and the civil liberties of all Americans. Finally, the paper warns that keeping aware of the deceptions of language is not just the task of educators and students but the responsibility of everyone. (PRA)

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William Bennett and the "Good War " Against Drugs :

Doublespeak and the Bush Administration's Hidden Agenda

by Tom Massey

When William Bennett, newly appointed Drug Czar, declared an all out "war" on drugs, it seemed just another verbal excess chosen to rally the nation against drug dealers, however in the past year it has become obvious that war is indeed being waged, and not just against those who sell and use drugs, but against the civil liberties of everyone. Under the guise of ridding society of what Bush called," the greatest threat facing the nation", increased Police powers have consistently attacked Constitutional guarantees against illegal search and seizure, self incrimination,guilt by association, false arrest, cruel and unusual punishment ,and due process . What is also obvious, is that the war is part of the administration's political strategy that appeals to middle class white voters most easily persuaded by an "us" versus "them" description of social problems - "us" being white , and "Them ", the non-white underclass.

Let's examine Bennett's version of Doublespeak and ask the pertinent questions about it . According to William Lutz, we can spot dishonesty in language by applying a simple test :"Who is saying what to whom, under what conditions and circumstances, with what intent, and with what results ?"(Doublespeak ,p. 2)

So to whom is Bennett speaking ? Though apparently addressing the entire nation, Bennett's actual call-to-arms is aimed at conservative law and order white voters, perhaps those swayed by Bush's Willie Horton card played in the last presidential election .

The conditions and circumstances in 1989 seemed ripe for a "Good War".With the breaking up of the Iron Curtain, the collapse of the Berlin Wall,a new independence sweeping the Communist nations

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of central Europe, the Cold War had ended . New "enemies" were needed, and Bennett found them . Drug dealers, of course, became the enemy, but not just the dealers.Drug users, parents and friends of drug users, landlords of drug users,and by implication, liberal organizations who defend them, like the ACLU were included in Bennett's hit list of the new enemy . If we look for the real intent , and the results of Bennett's war, it is obvious that the greatest damage so far has not fallen on drug abuse ,but on the Constitutional Liberties of all Americans . In particular, the people who have felt the brunt of this attack have been the most vulnerable- the minorities and underclass of society . More about this later .

Having declared war , Bennett has used the vocabulary customarily employed to separate "Us' from "them. " Those like the ACLU who have defended accused drug abusers, Bennett calls "traitors " .Those not actively engaged in the war are "slackers ". In place of "body counts "are numbers of arrests . Since there is not adequate jail space to house the captured enemy, Bennett urges "Bootcamps", or holding stockades in the Mojave for the vast numbers he hopes to capture . The war assumed more than metaphoric reality when U.S. forces invaded Panama to bring Noriega back to Miami to face charges on drug dealing . Overlooked was the fact that the CIA had supplied the Dictator with money to buy the drugs he sold . Is this Doublethink as national policy ?

Among the many Constitutional Rights abolished in this war climate has been the Fourth Amendment guarantee against illegal search and seizure.In 1990, the Supreme Court upheld the search of travelers who fit a "drug courier profile. " Thus empowered by this vague description, Police in Los Angeles roughed up Joe Morgan , ex - Cincinnati second baseman, who had flown to LAX in his role as a major league official . Jamal Wilks, former NBA star, also fit the "profile' and found himself handcuffed at the airport. Dozens more , less famous, have presumably fit the "profile," and though innocent , been apprehended and frisked .

The Court also ruled that motorists may be stopped at sobriety checkpoints, a ruling, which expanded, includes stop and search of passengers on public conveyances . In Florida vs. Bostick ,

prosecutors contend that police be allowed to routinely and randomly board buses and trains, question passengers, and search their bags even if there is no reason to believe a particular passenger is carrying drugs . The Florida Court ruled 4 to 3 that such searches are illegal, and evoked comparisons with Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia . Prosecutors have appealed the case to the Supreme Court which, as of this date, has made no ruling, but the conservative disposition of the present Court offers slight hope to libertarians . Remarking on the case, Bennett declared, "It's a funny war when the enemy is entitled to due process of law and a fair trial . By the way , I'm in favor of due process, but it kind of slows things down ." (Fortune , Mar.12 , '90)

The Constitutional protections against guilt by association and entrapment have been routinely violated in this war climate . Citing the imperatives of wartime, Bennett urges a no-holds-barred policy for action against not only people who use drugs, but their families. "The policy, "he explains , " establishes the principle that parents, including live-in boy friends and girl friends who serve as step parents, must bear responsibility for the behavior activities of minors in their charge . "(New Perspectives , p.49 , Sum. '89) The same mental set justifies entrapment, or any other method to bring drug users to trial . The case of Mayor Marion Berry is a famous example, but President Bush provided another in his Address to the Nation on Drug War and shows how Doublespeak works on the presidential level . In his address, Bush called drugs, "The gravest domestic threat facing our nation.", and declared , "Our most serious problem today is cocain . " To emphasize his point he held up a plastic bag of crack cocain and claimed it had been purchased by DEA agents in Lafayette Park across from the Whitehouse . In fact , the "buy" had been arranged with great difficulty by his speech writer . The dealer, it turned out, had never heard of Lafayette Park and didn't even know how to get there . Confronted by the press on the contradiction, Bush countered , "I don't understand .I mean has somebody got advocates here for this guy ?"

The Eighth Amendment against Cruel and Unusual Punishment has also taken a beating in this Wartime climate . In the past year ,

the State of Michigan sentenced 123 people to life imprisonment for possessing over 650 grams of cocain or other illegal drugs . On the Larry King show, Bennett suggested beheading as a suitable punishment for dealers . Such fervor, though unlikely to result in an institutionalized guillotine, at least reveals the mental set of the administration that trickles down to Law enforcement officers like Chief Gates in Los Angeles. Speaking to a Senate Hearing Committee on Drugs, Gates said , "We're in a war. Even casual drug users should be taken out and shot . "

Last year Delaware lawmakers, catching the punitive fever , proposed 46 anti-drug bills, including one that called for drug dealers to be flogged .In Indiana, judges can mete out 20 to 50 years for just three grams, and in Georgia , a second offender recently got a life term for selling 20$ worth of coke . Punishments are plainly disproportionate to the actual crimes.

So the Civil Rights of all Americans have been violated by this Good War, but the brunt of it has fallen upon those least able to defend themselves, the Underclass . According to many police officers and judges, war against drugs has turned into a de facto war against Blacks and Latinos who complain that their neighborhoods are barricaded by road blocks set up for I.D. checks, and that they are routinely rousted from their homes without warrants . As Norval Morris, a University of Chicago law professor says, "The whole law-and-order movement we've heard so much about is, in operation , anti -Black and anti- Latino . Not in plan, not in design, not in intent , but in operation " (L.A. Times Ap.22 ,1990 ,p.90) According to an analysis by the Sentencing Project in Washington , which researches criminal justice issues, one out of every four black men in their twenties is either in prison ,jail , or on probation or parole . "Jails in the United States more resemble those of South Africa with every passing day, "says Randolph N. Stone, chief public defender for Cook County , Ill.(LA Times , May 6 , 90 , p.A 36) In New York , 92 % of those arrested for drugs in 1989 were black or Latino . In Florida , state researchers predict that by 1994 nearly half of black men in the 18-34 age group will be locked up or under supervision . Match

this with Government generated statistics that 72% of drug use is by whites .

Responding to the war cry, police across the nation have organized operations with names like "Operation Invincible " in Memphis, "Operation Clean Sweep " in Chicago, "Operation Hammer " in Los Angeles, and the "Red Dog Squad " in Atlanta . How do they work ? In Atlanta police targeted a portion of the city's public housing units that house less than 10 % of the city's residents . They set up road blocks and stopped everybody for I.D. checks, searched their cars and persons and made 4800 charges during the first month . Results ? 3700 were cited for traffic violation, and of the remaining arrests half were for misdemeanors . All of the defendants were Black .

In Boston the ACLU filed a complaint against the Police Department after a Superior Court Judge ruled that police were practicing an official "search on sight " policy for Black males in the Roxbury and Dorchester sections of the city .

In Los Angeles where "Operation Hammer " is directed by smoke-a-joint-lose- your -life Darrell Gates , 55 residents accepted a three million dollar settlement from the city after Police officers demolished eight units in two apartment buildings suspected of use for drug sales . All the residents were black . "Hammer" strikes as hard at the public schools with arrests climbing into the hundreds . The last breakdown reveals that 96% of the defendants have been Blacks or Latinos .

Black leaders viewing the all-out war waged in the Inner Cities don't feel that these disproportionate percentages of arrests are merely the unintentional fallout of the Bennett\Bush campaign . As they see it, this zero-tolerance ,get-tough,total war waged against the underclass has significant political payoffs . In a Harper's article , Lewis Lapham calls the drug war a "Political Opiate " and declares that "Bush has exploited the same devise in his election campaign by transforming the image of Willie Horton, a black convict who committed a violent crime after being released on furlough from a Massachusetts" prison, into a metaphor for all the world's wickedness . . . The premise of the war is so patently false , and the

hope for victory so futile , I can make sense of it only by asking the rhetorical question 'cui bono ' ?Who stands to gain by virtue of Bush's lovely little war ?" (Dec. 1989 , p.41) .

Lapham, and others, believe the motive for political gain energizes Republican Southern Strategy by stirring up the racism latent in white middle and lower class voters . Bush's veto of the 1990 Civil Rights Act appeals to the same constituency .This strategy has a double payoff because it diverts voters from the economic problems facing the nation - the S&L collapse,housing, education, and health care - and from wondering whatever happened to the Peace Dividends . So far civil liberties, civil rights, and the underclass have been the targets in the "Good war ", though the administration obfuscates its objectives in a linguistic code that avoids combustible words .

By now conservative voters have learned how to interpret the Doublespeak of an Administration that doesn't even have to use "Black"in its pronouncements . For example ,"redistribution " no longer means investing resources equally with the underclass, it means "Welfare ",a code name for stipends to Blacks . For "Underclass" , read "Black "."Affirmative Action " has taken on the onus of " reverse discrimination "; and "Rehabilitation " now means early release and protection of violent Blacks, thanks to the Willie Horton ads .

So who is saying what to whom , under what conditions, and with what intent ? As Lapham argues, "The war on drugs becomes a useful surrogate for the obsolescent Cold War, now fading into the realm of a warm and nostalgic memory . Under the familiar rubric of constant terror and ceaseless threat, the government subtracts as much as possible from the sum of the nation's civil liberties and imposes a de facto martial law on a citizenry that it chooses to imagine as a dangerous rabble ." (Harpers,Dec. '89 p. 47) .

Though William Bennett recently resigned his post as Drug Czar,his total -war mentality continues to shape the strategy of the Administration . When Bush announced Bennett's replacement ,Bob Martinez, he listed among his qualifications the fact that Martinez , as governor of Florida , had signed 135 death sentences , a

recommendation more suitable for a High Executioner than the director of a program designed to remedy a social problem.

So the "Good War" goes on, disguised by Orwellian Doublespeak that conceals its real targets - the underclass and the civil liberties of all Americans.

Maybe the nightmare of 1984 is not here yet, but if it is only delayed or avoided altogether, it will be because we remain constantly alert to the deceptions of language. Keeping aware is not just the t ask of educators and students, but the responsibility of everyone.